

War drums are beating again in Washington. This time Syria is in the crosshairs after a massacre there last week left more than 100 dead. As might be expected from an administration with an announced policy of "regime change" in Syria, the reaction was to blame only the Syrian government for the tragedy, expel Syrian diplomats from Washington, and announce that the US may attack Syria even without UN approval. Of course, the idea that the administration should follow the Constitution and seek a Declaration of War from Congress is considered even more anachronistic now than under the previous administration.

It may be the case that the Syrian military was responsible for the events last week, but recent bombings and attacks have been carried out by armed rebels with reported al-Qaeda ties. With the stakes so high, it would make sense to wait for a full investigation -- unless the truth is less important than stirring up emotions in favor of a US attack.

There is ample reason to be skeptical about US government claims amplified in mainstream media reports. How many times recently have lies and exaggerations been used to push for the use of force overseas? It was not long ago that we were told Gaddafi was planning genocide for the people of Libya, and the only way to stop it was a US attack. Those claims turned out to be false, but by then the US and NATO had already bombed Libya, destroying its infrastructure, killing untold numbers of civilians, and leaving a gang of violent thugs in charge.

Likewise, we were told numerous falsehoods to increase popular support for the 2003 war on Iraq, including salacious stories of trans-Atlantic drones and WMDs. Advocates of war did not understand the complexities of Iraqi society, including its tribal and religious differences. As a result, Iraq today is a chaotic mess, with its ancient Christian population eliminated and the economy set back decades. An unnecessary war brought about by lies and manipulation never ends well.

Earlier still, we were told lies about genocide and massacres in Kosovo to pave the way for President Clinton's bombing campaign against Yugoslavia. More than 12 years later, that region is every bit as unstable and dangerous as before the US intervention -- and American troops are still there.

The story about the Syrian massacre keeps changing, which should raise suspicions. First, we were told that the killings were caused by government shelling, but then it was discovered that

most were killed at close range with handgun fire and knives. No one has explained why government forces would take the time to go house to house binding the hands of the victims before shooting them, and then retreat to allow the rebels in to record the gruesome details. No one wants to ask or answer the disturbing questions, but it would be wise to ask ourselves who benefits from these stories.

We have seen media reports over the past several weeks that the Obama administration is providing direct "non-lethal" assistance to the rebels in Syria while facilitating the transfer of weapons from other Gulf States. This semi-covert assistance to rebels we don't know much about threatens to become overt intervention. Last week Gen. Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said about Syria, "I think the military option should be considered." And here all along I thought it was up to Congress to decide when we go to war, not the generals.

We are on a fast track to war against Syria. It is time to put on the brakes.